

# Writing with Intention: Workshop writing with the self and others.



## Five Essential Practices

1. A nonhierarchical spirit ( how we treat writing) in the workshop is maintained while at the same time an appropriate discipline ( how we interact with the group) keeps writers safe.
2. Confidentiality about what is written in the workshop is maintained and the privacy of the writer is protected. All writing is treated as fiction unless the writer requests that it be treated as autobiography. At all times writers are free to refrain from reading their work aloud.
3. Absolutely no criticism, suggestion or question is directed toward the Writer in response to first-draft, just written work. A thorough critique is offered only when the writer asks for it and distributes work in manuscript form. Critique is balanced and there is as much affirmation as suggestion for change.
4. The teaching of craft is taken seriously and is conducted through exercises that invite experimentation and growth as well as through responses to manuscripts and in private conferences.
5. The leader writes along with the participants and reads that work aloud at least once a session. This practice is absolutely necessary, for only in this way is there equality of risk taking and mutuality of trust.

(Schneider, Pat, 2003 Writing with the Self and Others. pg X New York: Oxford University Press).

## Where I'm From

by George Ella Lyons

I am from clothespins  
from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride.  
I am from the dirt under the back porch.  
(Black, glistening,  
it tasted like beets.)  
I am from the forsythia bush  
the Dutch elm  
whose long-gone limbs I remember  
as if they were my own.  
I'm from fudge and eyeglasses,  
from Imogene and Alafair.  
I'm from the know-it-alls  
and the pass-it-ons,  
from Perk up! and Pipe down!  
I'm from He restoreth my soul  
with a cotton ball lamb  
and ten verses I can say myself.  
I'm from Artemus and Billie's Branch,  
fried corn and strong coffee.  
From the finger my grandfather lost  
to the auger,  
the eye my father shut to keep his sigh.  
Under my bed was a dress box  
spilling old pictures,  
a sift of lost faces  
to drift beneath my dreams.  
I am from those moments--  
snapped before I budded--  
leaf-fall from the family tree.

Exercises:

Seven  
Things

Objects

Postcards

Kitchen  
Table

Poetry

Hallway

First  
Lines

The First  
Time

Love  
Letter  
to an  
object

carnival	finger	snow
midnight	fire	eye
rocket	purple	mind
green	streak	splinter
tornado	fool	whirl
submarine	ripple	wind
lace	book	whisper
bellow	cinder	ribbon
sizzle	kiss	swallow
mirror	rain	bowl
sycamore	sigh	tiger
million	wave	bone
thunder	river	twist
elevator	puddle	cloud
emerald	dance	doze
moon	wet	ring
rush	bell	velvet
lightning	leaf	splash
lilac	bubble	scarlet
burn	artichoke	water
cement	red	time
tangle	hammer	shake
yellow	stone	jigsaw
light	circle	apron
hurricane	music	tremble
pale	violin	spiral
dark	umbrella	clang
dance	tongue	door
hill	hiss	gust
scatter	snap	glitter
morning	fish	chant
starfish	curl	desert
twirl	flash	string
narrow	twist	string
piano	window	spider
blue	listen	trumpet
parade	paper	paint

# Nuts and Bolts

## Write and Read First ( Five-Seven Minute exercises)

1. Seven things about me-make one fiction and have member try and guess.
2. The story of my Name
3. If I could write--- I would write about...
4. Write a letter
5. write a list

## The Scaffold of the group:

Make sure everyone takes up the right amount of space

Manage people who disappear and those who want to dominate.

Give everyone permission not to read but make sure everyone has space and invitation to participate.-address extreme situations privately

No storytelling

Focus on the writing

Put the emphasis on the narrator or the writer and the characters in the writing not the writer as a focus of the writing.

## Critique and Feedback

Absolutely no criticism or suggestions on new writing

Critique on finished work with writers request

Use Copies of work.

When possible, give work ahead of time for comments

Write on copies in pencil

Writer gets all copies

## Encourage publication

Submission Parties

Submission buddies

Create a zine for sale

Hold a reading event

Collaborate with local groups bookstores and writers

# ETHICS in the Group Setting

## **Vulnerability**

The leader is responsible for keeping healthy boundaries in the group setting. Even though the workshop functions in a beautifully in a non-hierarchical way, the leader must take care to manage issues that arise from dual relationships, disruptions , etc.

## **Privacy and Confidentiality**

No one is forced to write or read anything. Members are asked to hold the privacy of others and their own writing within the group structure and not address outside the group. In general writing should be guided toward public finished products. Readings and group work are a nice goal for a writing group.

## **Diversity as an Ethical Imperative**

How does the writing group support and offer a place for any and all who want to participate? How does the workshop offer a place for the marginalized and oppressed?

## **Taking up the right amount of space**

Sometimes one person can dominate or take up too much space depending on group dynamics. The workshop leader must gently manage shy or reticent writers to find their voice and also those who are good at getting attention.

## **Maintaining the five principals**

Although it doesn't always feel necessary, it is better to stick to the fiction guideline and keep the narrator separate from the writer in the room. If you teach this mode of interacting, it will assist members to take risks in their own writing and reading.

## **Listening Skills**

Reflecting what you like and what stays with you about another person's writing builds tolerance and listening skills in the members. Initially you may be doing most of the real feedback but this will improve over time.

## **Meet every person where they are...**

Sometimes you will have a writer pop out vividly and suddenly and other times someone may struggle with their voice. It's important to hold each person's writing with the same energy. If someone is disruptive ask them if they can sit with the group structure, offer choices and sometimes you can offer a writing exercise that get's at what is happening.

## **A Writing Workshop is not Group Therapy but it can be healing.**

Privacy should be supported. No one is ever forced to read. If someone reads something that sounds scary like a suicide note, we respond to the writing only. It is possible to check in with that person in a compassionate way after group but not as a therapist.

## **Critiques**

When folks have finished a piece they may request critique from the leader or the group. In general critique follows the format: What I liked.... What I had a difficulty with...? Comments are facilitated by the leader and also written in pencil on a copy of finished work.

## Using Fiction to get at the truth

1. Write a paragraph about something that really happened to you.
2. Write the same story but use a third person perspective
3. Write the same story in either perspective but add a fictional character or detail.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

7. \_\_\_\_\_

8. \_\_\_\_\_

9. \_\_\_\_\_

10. \_\_\_\_\_

11. \_\_\_\_\_

12. \_\_\_\_\_

13. \_\_\_\_\_

14. \_\_\_\_\_

14. \_\_\_\_\_

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1. \_\_\_\_\_

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13. \_\_\_\_\_

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# Ten Steps to Writing a Poem

## 1. You have probably already written a poem

Look in your journal and find an intense vivid piece of writing or write something new. Let it come out as prose. Use language that is natural to you. Write What matters to you.

## 2. Read it out loud to yourself slowly

Listen to the music of the language and don't lose the music as you revise.

## 3. Read it again and ask your self...

Have I written what is deepest and truest. Have I gone all the way? Have I seen clearly? Have I given clarity to the reader? The best revision is to be certain that you have told the truth. Sometimes you achieve more truth by cutting something. Sometimes you have to add something else.

## 4 Is there anything that you can omit...

Without losing the music, meaning or clarity? Are there words or ideas that are overused? Styles come and go in literature, just as they do in clothing. To wear clothing that is out of fashion is sometimes desirable, but usually it is done intentionally to signify rebellion, humor or farce. So too in writing, if you use archaic words or worn out rhymes ( o're, 'twere) ( moon June spoon croon) you will be repeating patterns that others before you made tiresome.

## 5.Try different line formations;

See whether by breaking a line in the middle of a phrase you enhance the meaning of both lines. Let every line stand on its own and have its own significance.

## 6. Have a sense of play.

Trust disconnections. Surprise yourself. If you get stuck, read it aloud again and go back to where the music was right. Cut back to there and begin again.

## 7. The end of the poem should open to wider significance.

Avoid closing it down too much. Try not to tell your reader what your reader can be trusted to discover. The images should open out to the significance of the subject. Read other peoples poems and identify how they did this.

## 8. Type it.

## 9. Let the visual shape of the poem on the page be satisfying.

Try breaking the lines in different patterns and also let it be a prose poem if this doesn't work.

## 10. Give it a title. Or Don't. Congratulations! You have written a poem.

Pat Schneider

## The Patience of Ordinary Things

It is a kind of love, is it not?  
How the cup holds the tea.  
How the chair stands sturdy and foursquare,  
How the floor receives the bottom of shoes  
Or toes. How the soles of feet know  
Where they're supposed to be.  
I've been thinking about the patience  
Of ordinary things. How clothes  
Wait respectfully in closets  
And soap dries quietly in the dish,  
And the towels drink the wet  
From the skin of the back.  
And the lovely repetition of stairs.  
And what is more generous than a window?

Pat Schneider

## Decision Villanelle

I wake and hear you pee in the sink.  
Already I was not sleeping well.  
Somewhere between us there is a link.

I am 18 and you tell me what to think.  
I wake even more when something fell.  
I wake and hear you pee in the sink.

The noise means that you've had too much to drink.  
This is not something that you will tell.  
Somewhere between us there is a link.

In the morning you may smile and wink.  
A normal breakfast is what you will sell.  
I wake to hear you pee in the sink.

I dream of a baby delicate and pink  
It wails inside a porcelain shell.  
Somewhere between us there is a link.

I think that I may have to call up my shrink.  
He will say: **Leave!**— like ringing a bell.  
I wake to hear you pee in the sink.  
Somewhere between us there is a link.

Annie Fahy

# Writing Quotes

*The easiest thing to do on earth is not write.*

(William Goldman)

*Writing is 90 percent procrastination: reading magazines, eating cereal out of the box, watching infomercials. It's a matter of doing everything you can to avoid writing, until it is about four in the morning and you reach the point where you have to write.*

(Paul Rudnick)

*The art of writing is the art of applying the seat of the pants to the seat of the chair.*

(Mary Heaton Vorse)

*We can't be as good as we'd want to, so the question then becomes, how do we cope with our own badness?*

(Nick Hornby)

*You don't start out writing good stuff. You start out writing crap and thinking it's good stuff, and then gradually you get better at it. That's why I say one of the most valuable traits is persistence.*

(Octavia Butler)

*People have writer's block not because they can't write, but because they despair of writing eloquently.*

(Anna Quindlen)

*If I waited for perfection, I would never write a word.*

(Margaret Atwood)

*Don't get it right, just get it written.*

(James Thurber)

*What I try to do is write. I may write for two weeks 'the cat sat on the mat, that is that, not a rat.' And it might be just the most boring and awful stuff. But I try. When I'm writing, I write. And then it's as if the muse is convinced that I'm serious and says, 'Okay. Okay. I'll come.*

(Maya Angelou)

*I think writer's block is simply the dread that you are going to write something horrible. But as a writer, I believe that if you sit down at the keys long enough, sooner or later something will come out.*

(Roy Blount, Jr.)

*Lower your standards and keep writing.*

(William Stafford)

*My block was due to two overlapping factors: laziness and lack of discipline.*

(Mary Garden)

## **Writing Fearlessly: Writing about Taboo subjects:**

Brainstorm a list of Taboo subjects

Or

Start with a piece of writing about a taboo subject: eg: Push by Sapphire, High Risk by Pat Califia. Read it out loud, after you finish give these instructions:

wait a beat, and then quietly suggest "You might write about addiction -- some kind that is not deeply serious, or the more serious kind-- Or you may want to ignore my suggestion, and just write whatever is on your mind." ( Usually do this for a longer writing space-25-30 min)

## **Writing For Transformation: visualization exercises:**

Begin with a mindfulness exercise. Eyes closed and relaxation in mind and body. I usually do this for three to five min then...

introduce a hallway, a house a room upstairs a parked car and once you have introduced the image invite the writing to start

Guided Writing exercise : Imagine a long road trip on a bus. On the bus is every critic and nay sayer in your life. When you arrive and get off the bus you are greeted by only by people who see your gifts and love you completely; support you and believe in you

Instruction: wait a beat and then say now its time to write what comes into focus for you... Or you may want to ignore my suggestion, and just write whatever is on your mind." ( Usually do this for a longer writing space-25-30 min)

# Books On Writing

Writing Alone and With Others, 2003, Pat Schneider, Oxford University Press.

That's How the Light get's In, 2013 Pat Schneider, Oxford University Press.

Writing the Mind Alive: The Proprioceptive Method for Finding Your Authentic Voice, 2002

, Linda Trichter Metcalf PhD, & Tobin Simon, Ballentine Books.

Bird by Bird 1995, Annie LaMott, Anchor Books, (Random House).

On Writing A Memoir of the Craft, 2000, Stephen King, Pocket Books (a division of Simon and Schuster).

## Publications

Poet's & Writers Magazine

[www.reddit.com/r/writing](http://www.reddit.com/r/writing)

[writingprompts.tumblr.com](http://writingprompts.tumblr.com)

[www.awa.com](http://www.awa.com)

[www.patschneider.com](http://www.patschneider.com)

*“...and I am out with lanterns, looking for myself.”*

- Emily Dickinson, The Letters of Emily Dickinson